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Cartographies of Occlusion and the Underground: Wanderings with(in) the Peak District

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A Blank space. That is how Middle Peak quarry shows up on the Ordnance Survey Explorer maps. All around the space are meticulously depicted, light brown contour lines graded darker with every 25 metres. Each road, and field wall is drawn in detail; each footpath is there for the walker to follow. Yet, coming across what appears to be a quarry, all of that detail disappears into plain white, as if nothing existed. The quarry marks unknown regions but is also like a ghost in the landscape, a reminder of the gaps in space, the volumes of rock removed.



Figure 1. Ordnance Survey Map of Middle and Dean Quarry near the towns of Middleton and Wirksworth. (© Crown copyright and database rights 2017 OS Digimap License)

The OS map showed a gap in the map. It was odd that within that gap a pair of paths converged together on a pond in the middle of the space. Could the paths be a remnant of a former trail or did they actually traverse the site? I thought I would take this route into the gap and perhaps see what the pond on my map meant. It would not be difficult to get to the site. However transgressing the boundary would be a bit harder. I began my walk on a path clearly marked on the map along the southern edge of the blank space, until I came upon barbed wire...I looked around and jumped over following the green dotted line on the map. No more than ten steps and a sheer chasm larger than two football fields and deeper than four double decker buses stops me from going any further. A slight rise on the ground makes me scramble partially up the grass-laden slope. Empty crisp packets, tin cans, and other litter is strewn around the make shift path that leads me to the top. In a moment the slope recesses beneath my feet revealing more than chasm I had only seen previously, for within the centre of the abandoned quarry are two azure coloured pools of water. They reflect the sunlight and clouds above and the vertical cliff edges of the quarry. Middle Quarry is an inactive quarry that represents the industrial ruins of modernity, in a spatial form^[1]. The quarry is a negative reminder of the industrial actions of the past^[2]. Negative in the way that the positive materials extracted have gone to construct the M1, and fertilise fields. Here is the remainder of that work. The 'negative dialectics' of the quarry shows a place not just altered but removed from the world around it, contained as 'rubble' keeping it from over flowing out into the 'spectacle'.



Figure 2. *View of Middle Quarry from southern edge looking into the two central pools* (Author 2014)

It is a sight that clearly shows a worked place, a place having been used and opened, managed and blown up. Yet the silence of the quarry is deafening. Across my view lays an industrial ruin, set within the heart of a 'natural' landscape, reinforcing the contradictory idea between what is beyond the boundaries, a National Park, and this reminder of modernity. I begin to descend into the chasm—down into the first level as if descending down Dante's multi-layered depths of his *Inferno*. This first level shows the remains of trucks and machinery, strewn glass, metal pipes, cables and wires, cracked concrete pads with their steel rust coloured rebars slowly oozing out of the decayed grey slabs. Each step carefully taken so as not to disturb this silent grave or injure myself in the process.

I descend down again, along steep banks to the secondary tier closing in on the pools below. I notice that the walls of the quarry are much larger than anticipated. Horizontal cuts can be seen across the site, where machinery and men have methodically removed blocks of the earth to use in all manner of purposes, this one probably for the construction of the M1 Highway. Further down I go as now I am at the third level of the quarry. A large menacing looking fence bars me from any access to the water and signs warn me of the dangers of diving in. The fence, rusted in parts, is clearly there for somebody's protection. I look to see if I can access any further. Only by abseiling down the last section can I access the lowest pool. I am unable to descend to its lowest depths. Yet, the pools from here show that they are vastly deeper than they seem from above. The aquamarine of the shore line fades into a deep royal blue hiding within its depths. I sit on a boulder for a while taking in the vastness of this opening, realising that this great opening served a purpose at one time, now just an empty hole. A ghost path on an empty space, a lost pathway erased from the land, but not from memory.

'Underground' Landscapes

This episode with my OS map in the Middle Quarry made me consider what else could be 'erased' from the map of the landscape. What was beneath those lines and what other spaces could be left out? The Peak District is known for broad heather covered moors, quaint villages, rolling pastureland criss-crossed by ruined drystone walls documented by the likes of Camden, Defoe, Fiennes, and Lawrence. Yet amongst the landscape are lesser known places, gritty 'underground' spaces, occluded by this Romantic spectacle. This article argues for the gaps in the landscapes, the underground spaces that are hidden from view challenging the dominant narrative of a Romantic Peak landscape. It looks at these hidden spaces seeking out an attunement towards a more nuanced understanding of the Peak District landscape where the mines, quarries and other underground processes enable a geographical space of hauntings^[3] and absence^[4]. It looks at notions of these underground geographies through three encounters with the landscapes told as a series of stories and narratives. These spaces of absence showcase a rich geography not usually seen in the travel guide.

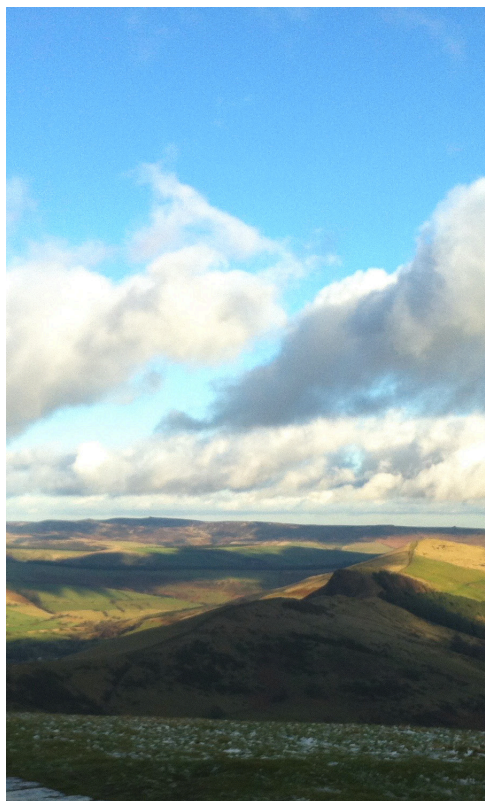


Figure 3. A view looking north east from the summit of Mam Tor, Peak District National Park (Author 2014)

The underground is explored through a combination of the physical senses of mines and caves and their verticalities in relation to the surface^[5]. The underground becomes a critical site of alternative encounters to realms that exist on the landscape, and I explore these encounters through the various notions of what the underground can be. The underground has many connotations, from the mine and cave, the subterranean infrastructure in London, Paris, or New York, to the elements hidden beyond sight in the earth. The underground can be considered in a variety of ways: sinister and dark, as a place to avoid where dangers await; sacred and respected, as the site of human origins or an act of pure immersion, wrapped within the earth^[6]. Therefore, the underground, like the ruin, is ambiguous and often fails to fit within the spectacle of the landscape. This section explores the underground as a space that subverts the surface, following Perez who states that most geographical work 'limit our understanding of territory and space to the surface, ignoring what goes on above and, closer to the case in point, below ground'^[7]. This horizontal bias has slowly been challenged by the urban geographies of Israeli settlement patterns and skyscrapers^[8]. In connecting the spaces of the underground to the surface, I hope to bring out and challenge these binary notions of the two and allow them to merge together. This underground exploration is linked to the subversive or unwanted components of the landscape blurring the boundary of these liminal zones between atmosphere and voids in the underground between the surface and subsurface, challenging us to re-encounter the mining landscape^[9]. The subterranean is thus envisioned as embodying the sensual and arousing the somatic experience, as well as understanding the politics of the underground in relation to the surface and the moral geographies that come from these less-than-seen places. This offers a way to explore an alternative to the dominant narrative of the Romantic Peak District by beginning to explore the underground geographies of caves and mines.

Humans lived in caves and underground caverns for most of prehistory, its darkness welcoming and safe, yet different from the darkness of the evening^[10]. The prehistoric caves in Lascaux and Altamira show that people lived and practiced rituals within these underground caves. In the United Kingdom, at Creswell Crags there are caves dotted within the limestone near the border of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. Carvings of large animals have been found, giving evidence of life in Britain over 12,800 years ago^[11]. The underground was considered a sacred space, a ritualised space for the engagement in art, religion, death and economy^[12]. Greek and Roman mythologies see underworld as the realm of Hades, and although considered the place of death and sadness, it was also where rich minerals like gold, silver and tin could be attained. Through time, that idea of the underground has taken hold in the European context, and what had once been a sacred space perceived out of bounds to human intervention came to be regarded, increasingly, as a resource that could be legitimately and systematically exploited for the enhancement of human wealth^[13].

Mines

This exploitative idea would take the shape of the mine. Lewis Mumford explored the underground through the mine in *Technics and Civilisation*, 'The mine...is the first completely inorganic environment to be created and lived in by man: far more inorganic than the giant city that Spengler has used...Field, forest, stream and ocean are the environment of life: the mine is the environment alone of ores, minerals, metals....Day has been abolished and the rhythm of haute broken: continuous day-an-night production first came into existence here^[14]'. This has led to vast tracts of earth removed for metals, minerals, and oil. In Derbyshire, miners and other subterranean labourers have endured countless hours underground, etching away at the earth to recover minerals for use in everyday life. They are vast underground terrains, warrens of adits, tunnels, shafts, a maze or labyrinth following the mineral veins of the earth. Ongoing work on the environmental history of soughs shows a politics of the underground, particularly in water usage and heritage, where the economic and financial burdens of driving soughs to lower the water to access more mineral became so high to render it financially sustainable^[15]. It was not until the connection of the mills on the Derwent River, such as the Arkwright Mill, that the use of now consistent water flow from the sough was possible.

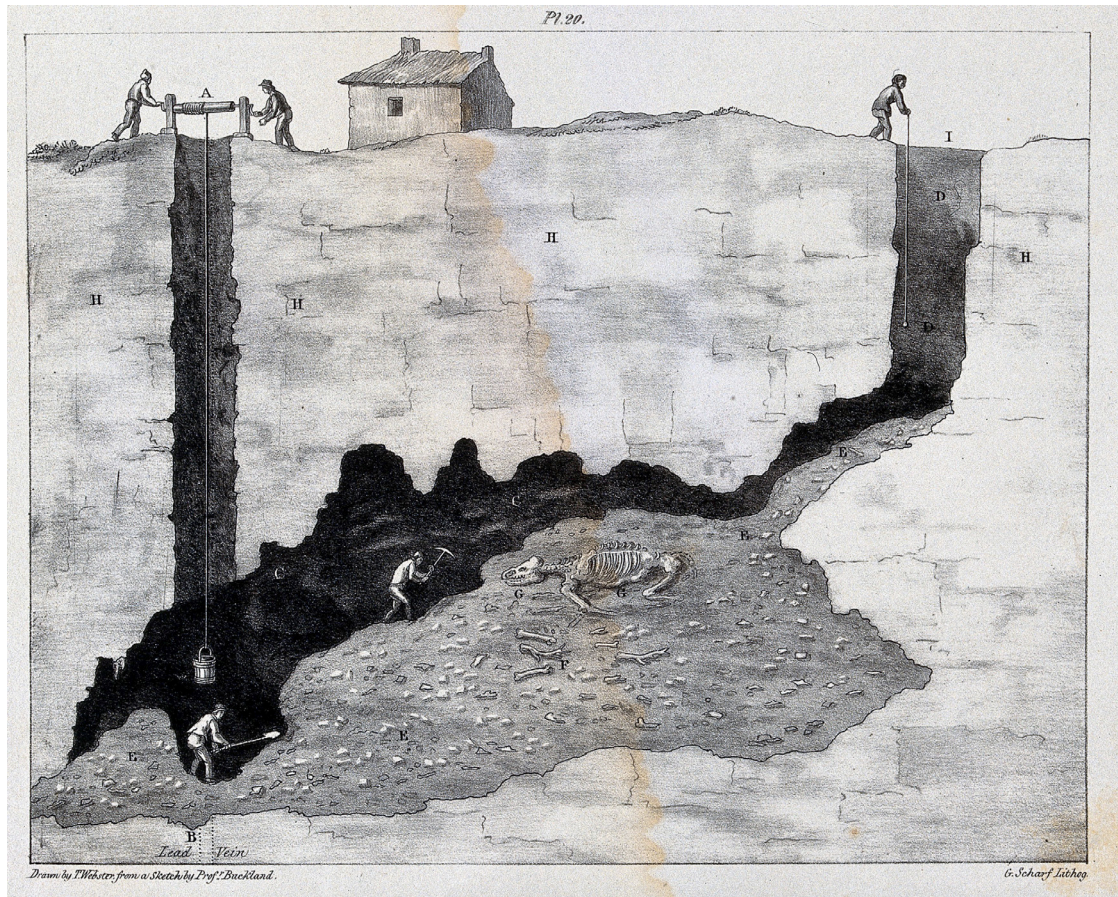


Figure 4. Cross-section of a lead mine in Derbyshire, showing miners working towards an animal fossil, Lithograph by T. Webster after a sketch by Prof. Buckland, 1822? (Wellcome Collection 42479i)

Today, people explore caverns for recreation and pure curiosity like the Peak District Mines Historical Society, and Winster Cavers group. This wonderment can be understood as intimate and womblike, suggesting complex sensuous relations between the body and the earth^[16]. I consider a mine (or cavern) to be the 'negative space' of processes of removal, meaning the mine only comes through existence by the removal of material from one place and transported to another place. If you look at a cavern in limestone, the slow erosional processes of water and earth movement slowly transport dissolved minerals from one space to another. A good example of this is the formation of stalagmites and stalactites, where water in solution transport the solution of calcium from the ceiling of the cave towards the ground, slowly accreting a newly-formed structure^[17]. A cave or mine is always in a state of 'becoming' and to understand not only the 'positive' aspects of those materials (the minerals that get transported to some new place, be it in the form of patio paver, a silver coin, or ingested into a human body via water), but also the result and continuing effects of that process. Our underground life is as much a part of who we are, as it is above ground; yet the underground is more than the physical space, below the surface of the earth.

Verticalities

The idea of the underground therefore can be more metaphorical than what it at first may seem. Williams uses the underground to understand how modern life has developed a technologically anthropocentric built society focused on the 'excavation' of truth over the conquest and subjugation of a natural world^[18]. Modern society's continued manifestation of an artificial world forces us to rethink our relationship with our environment as it is considered a place of post-apocalyptic realms, where after some damaging anthropogenic

event people are forced to live in the earth (see Forster, 1909, *The Machine Stops* or DuPrau, 2003, *City of Ember*). Yet, Williams shows how regions have split into poor regions and wealthier regions, these poor regions hidden from view and thought through a vertical segregation^[19]. Social stratification then becomes an underground, with an underground of working poor supporting a realm of wealthier people 'above'. A moralising of levels is thus engendered. This idea is taken up in the work on Guatemalan high-rise buildings that have seen in the capital city an increase in social stratification between those above and those below, and its effects on the city's development^[20]. There are underground economies and underground artistic movements, from where the underground then traverses beyond physical spaces, exploring the depths of human vagaries. Williams makes a point that humans have already lived below the surface, and the mining landscape already exists underneath the atmosphere^[21]. As I have shown, the underground continues to evade our understanding of what it is, from something contested, to something used in the control of social classes. A relationship is established between the labour of the surface and the labour below ground. This ambiguity allows the underground a type of slippage that is useful in understanding the fragments and telling of other stories of the landscape. The surface is just one of the many strata of the earth and we as humans exist within the boundary of one strata and the other.

Narrative Cartographies

The following stories explore the themes of the underground through a collection of vignettes done from my eight-month ethnographic research in the southern Peak District from mid-2013 into early 2014. A combination of participant observation and oral history collection formed the majority of my methods. The stories are written in the voice of the person telling the narrative, with my own commentary running throughout. Most of the stories are told in the first person of the narrator, whether they be my own or one of my participants. The reason for this is to show that the landscape is not just from the observer; rather, I wanted to create an assemblage of narratives that presents an entangled performance between myself and my participants.

Underground Streams

When the builders were restoring Mrs. Fipp's cottage they had removed the flooring and sub flooring from the ground floor leaving the open ground below. Instead of ground though, a small stream was running diagonally across the main room, this the builders noted was a part of the Bonsall Brook. The builders would have to channelise the stream and divert it slightly to one end. Though the builders were not concerned, I began to think how many other streams ran underneath this region.

Along with surface streams, due to the limestone and its naturally occurring waterways, the limestone karst region is found with over 350 soughs across Derbyshire, which accounts for almost 100 kilometres of channels^[22]. Soughs are channels excavated underground to lower the water table around sections of mineral that miners wanted to remove. These 'tunnels' would traverse across entire valleys and hillsides to transport water from a particular baseline down towards river valleys. Their construction was slow and unassuming but useful in removing water for the mines. Overtime, they became an important supplier of consistent water flow to the growing mills along the Derwent during low river periods. The only visual component of the sough is the outlet at a river or stream, however a few like the Cromford Sough have great cisterns and wells where the water course is diverted, reconnected and altered to flow either to a holding pond or towards the river.



Figure 5. *Stone arching to support a section of bad roof in Meerbrook Sough* (photo by Paul Deakin). From Trevor D Ford and Jim Rieuwerts, 'Lead Miners' Soughs in Derbyshire', *Geology Today*, 23, 2 (2007) 57-62. (p.62)

Unseen by most people, its impact is felt in the economic, environmental, and historical significance of the region. Enfield shows the financial concerns of constructing such soughs not only created a political atmosphere as to who 'owned' the water^[23]. Today these 'underground streams' are actants within the larger environment and heritage assemblage. Many of these soughs maintain a certain type of ecology on the surface, allowing the surface to drain more water than it could hold originally. These alterations, though unseen, are felt when heavy rain falls. If a sough is blocked, as many happen to do, the water table changes shifting and flooding not only underground ruins (e.g.-the mines) but also affecting the surface ecology.

Returning to the Bonsall Brook and Mrs. Fipps's house, I think about how such workings under the village go unknown and unheard, only to reappear when something fails^[24]. In understanding the failure or repair of these soughs, I can begin to see the incredible faith that people have that the infrastructure will not fail. Today, all you can see of the water flows are remnants of the brook, appearing on the side of cottages, hearing it percolating through the limestone walls and foundations, not paying any notice to the vast watery network that is there to keep it from flooding.

Ringling Rake

I had met Rick at the pub. Amongst the second, or was that the third pint, Rick asked, "What are you doing tomorrow?" I replied, "Um...nothing really. Why?" Rick, matter-of-factly, asks, "How would you like to go

down an old mine? It's not that long and the only difficult part is the entrance where you have to abseil about forty metres down." So with a nod and a firm handshake I agreed to meet Rick the following night at the Artist's Corner playground parking lot wearing a warm underlayer but no jeans, as those trap the cold. Rick jumps out and greets me, as well as two other young men who have joined Rick. Their athletic frames show that they are clearly agile for a trip like this. Rick figures that it is best that we all jump into the Land Rover to head up Masson Hill. Everyone piles into the vehicle, it is cramped and muddy smells emanate from all parts of the truck. The Land Rover clamours up the side of the hill along a small single track road called Salter's Lane. Historically, the lane was used by pack horse carts transporting salt and other goods over the moor to the market towns of Matlock below and Winster above. It is now the alternate route up the hill and commonly used by the locals of the region^[25].

After a fifteen minute ride, the Land Rover lurches to a stop at the end of a farm track. The light of the day has waned, but gives a brief amount of faint light to see the outline of the hill above and the fields beyond. After walking about five minutes we arrive at a large bush and Rick announces, "We are here!" Wherever here is, must not be obvious, but just below the bush is a stone (or concrete cap) and what looks like a small bar across an opening no larger than a toaster oven. On hands and knees, Rick tells me that to begin, we will descend down what is colloquially called 'Gentlewomen's Shaft', which is a partially natural opening in the earth and a shaft sunk into what is known as Ringing Rake, a drainage section of the larger Masson Mines and soughs within the eastern edge of Masson Hill above Matlock Bath^[26]. My first of many underground performances, this one remains markedly vibrant in memory. It also gave me 'potholer' points as it is, rightly so, a difficult descent. This trip speaks of not only the labour involved in making the mine, but the sensuality that comes from being underground. Furthermore, it challenges the way that a vertical geographies of topographies connects the surface with the subterranean. For me I think through the mine as contiguous with the space above, a volume rather than just two planes of overlapping space, joined by a shaft^[27].

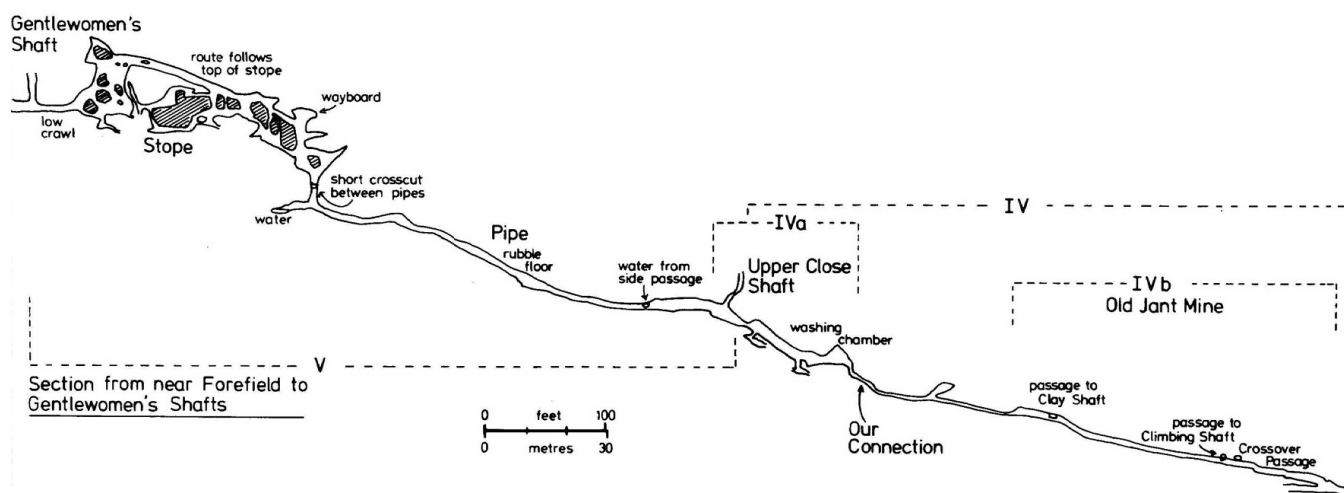


Figure 6. Cross-section of Ringing Rake down toward Youd's Level (Wariner et al. 1981)

I am attached to the metal bar via a climbing rope and told to slowly lower myself down the opening until my feet reach a small ledge. I crawl backwards with bated breath, just squeezing my frame through the opening. I am now standing just forty feet over an open mine shaft attached to the bar with only a rope, and told to just let my weight rest into the confined space of the shaft. I think, "What am I doing? This is not what I signed up for." However, I do what I am told and trust that the rope, and the small *gri-gri* (a climbing device to control descent) will slowly lower myself into the shaft. This was the point of no return, it was either climb

back up through the opening or keep descending until the end of the trip. And so letting gravity slowly take over, I lean back slightly and let the rope begin to slide through the *gri-gri*. I begin my descent down the shaft barely a metre in diameter. My head torch lights just the immediate walls around me, and I notice the evenly stacked stones lining the shaft. Slowly, I lower myself further. At this point the stacked stone walls become part of a natural fissure of the rock. The walls narrow around me temporarily lodging me into a tight opening. I pause to collect myself and notice that I am about halfway down. I hear Rick up above calling out reassuring statements, “It’s alright! You’re almost there! Keep going!” None of which are actually helping. A slide across the gritty rock and flattening myself out, I finally manage to get myself through the gap and now I hang just a few metres from the base of the shaft. With a few final releases of the *gri-gri* I land with a squish and a thud onto the muddy floor.

Turning my head torch up to the highest setting, I notice how large the chamber I’m in is. A circular space sloped downward into a dark opening. A few minutes later, Rick and his other companion have made their way to the base of the shaft and have collected their equipment into a waterproof bag. We are now about to set off on a four hour journey through Ringing Rake ending up, Rick hopes, at the parking lot at the base of the hill by the Derwent River. And so we collect their gear and head off into the darkness. The first obstacle I encounter is a climb up through an opening into a chamber about five metres above me. I crawl up the wet rock avoiding the small but deep chasm next to me. I breathe a sigh of relief having made it to the top. However, the next half hour is spent crawling through tight crevices, jumping over openings, and trying not to get too wet from the constant flow of water falling onto the rocks.

Once through the chambers and stoops, we reach a section of relatively easy crawling through a long series of narrow tunnels that follow the slow gradient down the hill. The constant pull of gravity is felt even underground, ever pulling me down the slanting passageways. Sometimes the group stops to catch their breath and to look at the walls again. This is when I realise that throughout all the crawling and climbing I have missed the marks on the wall. The walls at first glance are a dirty grey colour until I realise that they are covered in white minerals of calcite and barytes. All through this underground obstacle course, Rick tells me how the mine was created. “Here is where the miners placed a shot hole to open up the mine” and there on the wall are the remnant marks of a miner’s tool having drilled into the stone to deliver a section of gunpowder to blow the rock, “and look here how they left this piece of mineral formation. Strange that they did not take it.” The darkness hides their sparkle but as Rick’s head torch shines upon them they glow intensely, showing their four-sided points like the many rowed teeth of a shark’s mouth. We are walking within a mineral cabinet of wonders.

Over two hours have passed making the group a bit tired, a pause is had to have a bite to eat of candy bars and for everyone to catch their breath. After a few minutes, we realise how cold it actually is within the mine workings. The chilled air feels nice when moving around but slowly permeates through our now wet boiler suits when sitting still. The chill does not subside and so we continue further down following the slope of the hill above. By now we have traversed just under two kilometres, and have crossed underneath fields, and farms, finally descending into the town of Matlock Bath. We continue our walk through more tunnels, where more marks on the walls are seen, strange letter combinations GR and WW’ and numbers like 1793 and 1773. These, I presume, are initials of miners and the date that it was inscribed on the wall of the mine. The markings of labour are present throughout many of the mines in the region. These marks are particularly well preserved representing a physical connection to the people who were working underground. These remnants signify a key component of the underground practices that created this mine. The shot holes, the scratch marks, the graffiti, represent a ‘ghost’ of the laboured past, a type of ‘temporal collage’ on the wall^[28]. I think of how this space must have been for the miners and how it is for me today and realise that it was nowhere near as difficult today as for them to dig, carve, pick and remove the earth and stone to reach the mineral ore.

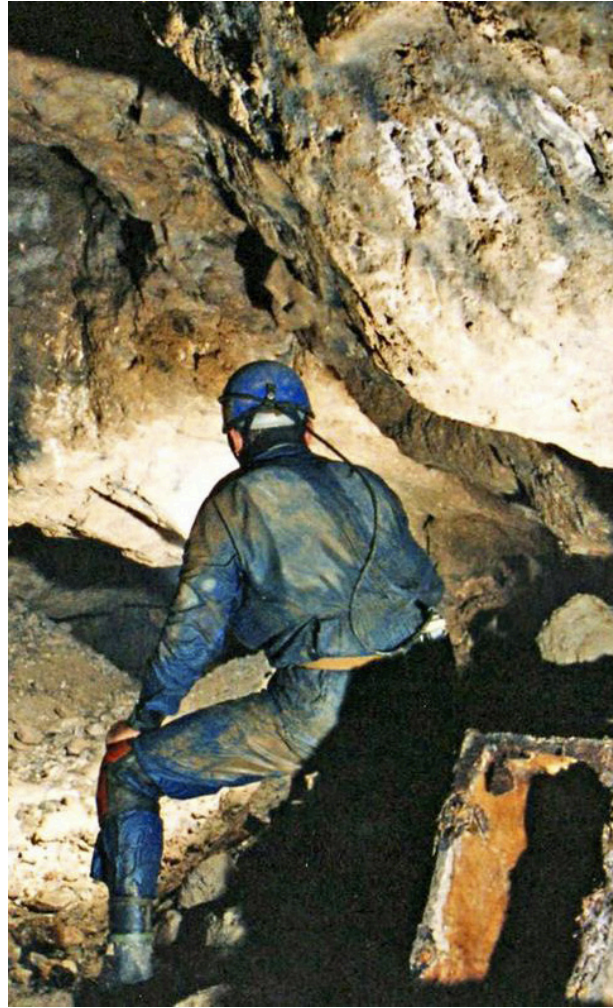


Figure 7. *View of chamber within Ringing Rake* (Roy Fellows 2012)

These thoughts get thrown out with the next obstacle as we enter a small and narrow section of the system. One where the water table has reached the level of the mine floor. Through most of our journey we have been lucky to have experienced minimal water on the walls and ground. Yes, it has been muddy, but Rick reminds me that just a few months ago it was flowing with water. Just ahead of us Rick shines his torch at the small opening and a large rock that we must duck under to continue our journey. There is also about 15 centimetres of water at the opening meaning it is more or less submerged for a good metre of length on either side. What needs to happen is to lay face down in the water and slide under the stone through the opening and emerge on the other side. “It’s quick and easy,” says Rick before quickly sliding through. He yells the all clear and now it’s my turn. Crawling towards the narrow opening I use my gloved hand to remove some more of the silted rocks to make more space in the opening. I lower my face into the water and move quickly and deliberately under the opening, but I’m stopped by my shoulders. They cannot pass through the opening and are lodged into the rock. A moment of panic—as my face is underwater and trapped in a mine underground, I flail and immediately back up and push myself back out of the water. Heaving for air I sit up slightly thinking about how I am going to make it through. Rick clamours, “Are you ok? Take it easy and rest for a moment.” This time, Rick’s voice actually helps and provides some comfort in the cramped space. Cant suggests that the underground realms of cave disrupt the body in pursuits of everyday life^[29]. Clearly, this was a major disruption to my everyday activities, which was nothing compared to the work needed to excavate this mine.

I compose myself and tell myself I can do it, yet I will have to lay down completely in the water with my face up and head into the gap feet first through the opening. This does not seem like a pleasant experience,

however it seems like this will be the only way through. I slither along the cold and muddy water, inching along until my face and nose are up against the ceiling of the chamber only a few centimetres from the water level, the water filling into my ears. Again I am slightly stuck, but with my face out of the water I can focus on the task to get through the opening. Slowly I wriggle through, one shoulder at a time. My nose constantly brushes up against the stone, the grittiness of it scratching the sensitive skin. Now with what seems like an age, but is actually probably just thirty seconds, I give one final heave with my legs and I pop through the other side. A great relief falls upon me, and a big grin goes across his face. I pull myself out of the water and onto a drier bit of the mine floor and with a short break we continue our journey.

The latter part of the trip goes on smoothly, through more passages covered in mineral remains, and remnant markings on the walls. Along the way different spaces are encountered, a washing room, a room where the remnants stones called 'deads' are stacked up to the height of the ceiling. We step into another room where a wall of letters and numbers are etched into the wall. Rick beckons me through a small passageway and points up to a carving of two people standing one on top of each other. One of the caricatures has a double pointed hat, whereas the second one has only one point. Their footwear have a type of raised heel and one of them is carrying a stick or cane. It is not known how old they are but it is assumed that they are from the eighteenth century. These tiny carvings, etched into a single stone remind me once again of the people that came before me.

We continued now into the final section of the route, a two kilometre run of the sough into what is called a coffin level. It is called such because it is shaped in profile like an elongated irregular hexagon shaped like a coffin box. Although I am not a tall man, I have to stoop and bend over and walk or crawl through ever increasing water on the floor of the level. This section becomes tedious and arduous as maintaining a stooped position becomes ever increasingly difficult for now after a three hour journey through the drainage passageways. Therefore, we slush along, four weary men through the cold water and cramped passageway. As my fingers run along the walls, I notice now the ridges running vertically on the walls, noting how the miner must have chiselled away inch by inch, blow by blow into the hard limestone not knowing if he was going to make it, but instinctively knowing that he would inevitably make it to an end.

Another half hour passes and the passage widens and tree roots are seen through the roof of the laden route. Water is heard falling from overhead and it now reaches knee height. The walking is slowed in the cold but clear water, however the murmur of cars is heard now, as the group nears closer to the end of their journey. Finally after almost four hours of crawling, climbing, and navigating through extremely tight spaces, we reach a rusty ladder and climb up to a small metal hatch, which is opened into the middle of a playground by the shores of the Derwent River. Cant also suggests that what happens below ground is just as important as what happens above ground and that the topographies of the underground inscribe themselves on the surface via manhole cover placements, road alignments and locations of houses^[30]. These above and below ground geographies emphasise the impact that these 'hidden' places have on the surface. In this case, the underground geographies have affected the local ground water level with the construction of the sough that I ended up walking through at the end of the trip, which has altered the regional ecology and need for deeper wells in the region. Furthermore, material traces of the mine shafts openings that dot the surface, though difficult to find, are the few and tenuous connections of the spaces below.

I am quite taken by the sudden change in scenery, where our immediate surrounding was hewn from the stone and now I am back into the openness of the dark evening space. It is made even more surreal by the presence of the swings and slide near the hatch. We all file out quickly and begin to undress in the middle of the parking lot, peeling off the layers of wetsuits and very soggy clothing. However, I decide that I will stay in my boiler suit and meet up with the group at the village pub else no one will believe what we have just done.

‘Alternate’ ways of play

Sam began to tell me, “We used to go potholing. We never used to tell our parents where we were. You know, if anything would’ve ever happened we would’ve been in trouble. But, you know, we used to go upon the hillside on Balleye Hillside and dig, find a mine, dig the top off, and put an iron bar across the top and roll the ladders out, we would roll out our ladders, and just send down as many as we needed to get to the bottom. And off we go. It was really stupid. For any reason that bar got moved, we were in big trouble, but luckily it never did. That particular one we went down I think it was something like 200 foot. We’d only got 200 feet of ladders. And when we climbed to the bottom of the shaft the ladder was about 5 foot off the floor, finished about five foot off the floor. So we dropped down into the clay, I was mentioning, and went for like a good few hours potholing.”

This vignette is a compilation of three stories by Sam, a local builder and landscaper. He has lived in Bonsall for most of his life. This story explores the former childhood practices of exploration and trespassing into abandoned mines, in reckoning with these ruins^[31]. These practices, though understood as dangerous and possibly not even allowed today, were seen, at that time in the late 1970s, as part of life. The children knew that they were up to dangerous things, but were confident in their actions. Reflecting upon Edensor, Sam’s childhood explorations contain an immersive and bodily affect of his recollections within the mines, creating an immersive disposition of his experiences^[32].

He continued, “If you know what you were looking for, you can see where the land’s been dug out. And if you go into the bottom and what we used to do was go jumping and stamping around and you sometimes could hear a bit of a hollow sound. So we’d just get spades and dig the grass off. Till we found, they used to put like big old timbers over them when they were sealing them up, and then just soil over ‘em. But we used to dig down to the timbers and move ‘em and off we go. There’d just be a hole there.” Only a third of mine shafts are capped, and this only in the last thirty years. Prior to that time, any mine shafts that were covered would have been done at the landowners’ prerogative. These mine shafts would be hidden under the brush and sod, protected only by large wood planks. Here an explicit act of trespass and transgression are done. Not as a defiant act towards the owner, but simply out of curiosity. This action though, transcends a broader idea of control and exclusion.

Mines were considered dangerous but a part of the life of the landscape. These speleological actions are considered a type of scientific endeavour, yet it is also a personal and incisive exploration of bodily pursuit to go underground^[33]. They are incurred beyond the surveillance of the parents, beyond a protected and controlled landscape, deep into an unknown realm. The underground becomes a place for freedom, for acts of subversion, becoming a freeing space from the moralising landscape of the surface^[34].

Sam then changed his tone, “There was one, another one on Balleye hillside which is a lot lower down. We decided to do that one day, me and me mate who we used to go with. And we went down a shaft, it wasn’t very deep probably thirty foot deep. But the tunnel was only let’s say two foot by three foot, it was quite small. So it was more or less crawling and we spent half an hour crawling down this tunnel. Eventually we could hear water running. We thought, oh wow that’s interesting we might meet a waterfall or something. We kept crawling and eventually we come around a corner. And what they’d done. They’d dam. They’d made a dam in this tunnel. They dammed the water back, and they used timber and clay to dam it up. And it was all spewing out from between the clay and it all had cracks in it. It was all cracked everywhere, and all bits of clay fell out, and this water was spilling out. And that’s what we could hear, you see. But if you imagine it was a lot, must have been a lot of water pressure behind there. So we was like, back out. We managed to turn and get out as quick as we could. If that thing went...”



Figure 8. A view looking north from just above Slinger Wood up towards Balleye Quarry, Note the Via Gellia running through the wood along the Bonsall Brook's edge (Author 2014)

The practices and remains of the historic miners have altered the surface but also the subsurface hydrological actions of the region. Unlike pumps and other mechanical devices that, once removed, allow the water can return (like water regaining its mean level). The physical underground changes from the tunnels, soughs, and construction of small dams, have lowered or raised the water table, moved water to sites which never had it and removed water from other places^[35]. These historic actions are not seen on the surface, but undermine the hydrological processes of the region. Recent work on the soughs of the region have shown that these tunnels not only removed water from mines but also have permanently altered the water table, and are part of the modern public water supply^[36].

Haunted Landscapes

These stories recognise that the underground and hidden never truly leave us, or what Derrida would call a haunting 'that folds time and unsettles the linear sense of time as it is represented^[37]'. Haunting is 'a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us effectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as transformative recognition^[38]'. A haunted landscape is thus engaged in a struggle with the past and present and about bringing back the past into the present, therefore, a haunted landscape can be considered a type of heritage making, a new way of telling and retelling the past, where the 'histories that cannot rest' are made to be present in the landscape^[39].

In spatial terms 'hauntings' are explored in ruins, through benches on a coast^[40], through the fragments of a Montana homestead^[41], as well through the immaterial traces of radioactivity^[42]. The present and the past are situated here in dialogue with each other, but rather than just a one way dialogue, these traces tell of an imaginative, and politicize landscape, of spaces that push back against the grain of the spectacle. These spatial reminders of ruins, waste sites or abandoned sites, all bring into question the past with the present in the same way the bodies of dead animals, or the remains of people show an 'afterlife' constantly present within the landscape^[43]. These 'ghosts' of the landscape are remaking the landscape, as much as the living are making it, struggling between what is absent and what is present persisting through the decay, underground remains, and subversive practices. The spectre of landscape thus emerges in the illicit actions of trespassing onto a quarry, the underground encounters in an abandoned mine, or the gaps on a map.

Fragmentary absence

My final point is to 'attune' myself towards these hauntings better to understand the atmosphere of absence. Absence like atmosphere is an ambiguous term, where it is neither positive nor negative, but can be an unsettling notion of emptiness or a displacement of the self^[44]. The fragments and ruins generate a type of absence that are created in relation to the bodies that we encounter. For example the underground can be understood as absences in the earth. The absences in the earth are vast, but not seen. These spaces exist below our main surface realm, and are felt as loss, of death in the past and voids in the physical, emotional and spiritual landscape. These spaces are necessarily *forgotten* on purpose to forget a traumatic memory of someone lost, or are covered over, filled to process the forgotten past. This existential emptiness is attributed to negative connotations, and is where an emptiness is considered deeply sorrowful^[45]. However, absence can also be considered an ideal to reach by attuning to the 'atmospheric serenity' of the landscape. In that, rather than simply awaiting for the absence to be revealed, a type of engagement in absence making is made through these practices. The voids immersed around are the *lacunae* of the landscape. The voids that remain in the landscape can be left open like an abandoned quarry. At other times it can also be a vessel to be filled, to flow and hold new material and new ideas and feelings. The mining landscape is filled with voids and these voids are filled, covered over, tapped, or reopened. Constantly, these absences are not just there but are manifested to remind us of the futility in our desire to separate from our past. Therefore, these absences subvert and undermine the processes of spectacle, focusing on the energies, emotions, and 'becomings' of the landscape through its decay and its re-making^[46].

The stories I have covered in this article transgress the boundary of materiality dealing into ephemeral realms of absence and the attunement to a different type of remembering. Many of these stories are told furtively and in a hushed tone, where secret underground space becomes a place for encounters and daring adventures. A ghostly absence is encountered and made through these stories, a mine reopened and a place restored, unforgotten in the process. Death, decay, melancholy can be attributed as something negative, however it is a normal way of life, it is the action that brings about within the landscape and many of which gets hidden lost, and partially remembered. Absence is present in the waters they drink and the animals that perish showing a presence that moves beyond the corporeal into an ephemeral element that is barely there. These fragments engagement with the landscape thus are a way of retelling the story of the landscape in a way that opens up the spectacle from within.

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 3. Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (London: Routledge, 1994).
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9. Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*. (London: Routledge, 2013).
10. Rosalind H. Williams, *Notes on the Underground: An Essay on Technology, Society, and the Imagination* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008) p. 8.
11. Alistair Pike et. al., 'Verification of the age of the Palaeolithic cave art at Creswell Crags, UK.' *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 32, 11 (2005) 1649–1655.
12. Plato's Allegory of the Cave (The Republic Book VII), tells the story of where people chained to wall that look upon a blank wall where images and shadows are presented to them as reality. In the process, one of those escapes to the surface to realise that the truth of the spectacle was below ground and to attain 'true' knowledge was only by coming out from below. This idea of coming out of darkness into light, is repeated through other fairy tales, folk tales of the surface and the underground.
13. R. Williams, 2008, pp. 54-56.
14. Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1934) p.69.
15. A sough is a channel built underground to remove water from an area, where in the process it alters the water table, eventually lowering it to be able to reach the newly exposed mineral and be able to continue mining. The technology of soughs was highly simple but effective in allowing miners to dig deeper into the ground, without the use of pumps.
16. Cant, 2003.
17. There are a few other types of caves, one called a primary cave, which is formed at the time as the resulting rock around it, like a lava tube (Greeley 1987). The other type is created through an additive process called 'talus or depositional caves' formed by the resulting space that is left behind from the debris of a rockfall or talus (Kastning 2005). In this sense the cave is truly formed from the negative space that remains in between the rocks. An example of this type of cave, called Indian Caves, is found at the base of the 1200 metre cliffs of Yosemite Valley, California.
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19. R. Williams, 2008.
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21. R. Williams, 2008, p.212.
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30. S. Cant, 2003, p. 67.
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35. T. Ford and J. Rieuwerts, 2007, p. 62.

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37. Lars Meier, 'Encounters with Haunted Industrial Workplaces and Emotions of Loss: Class-related Senses of Place Within the Memories of Metalworkers', *cultural geographies*, 20, 4 (2012) 467-483 (p.470).
38. Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
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